

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE NORTHERN DISTRICT OF TEXAS
DALLAS DIVISION

CARLOS HUGO VALDEZ,)	
ID # 1254215,)	
Plaintiff,)	
vs.)	No. 3:08-CV-0946-B (BH)
)	ECF
RONALD D. WELLS,)	Referred to U.S. Magistrate Judge
Defendant.)	

**FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATION
OF THE UNITED STATES MAGISTRATE JUDGE**

Pursuant to the provisions of 28 U.S.C. § 636(b) and an Order of the Court in implementation thereof, subject cause has previously been referred to the United States Magistrate Judge. The findings, conclusions, and recommendation of the Magistrate Judge are as follows:

I. BACKGROUND

Plaintiff, an inmate in the Texas prison system, filed this action against his former attorney under 42 U.S.C. § 1983. (Compl. at 3-4 and attached pages.¹) He claims that his attorney rendered ineffective assistance of counsel with respect to the state criminal action that resulted in his incarceration. (*Id.*) He seeks \$25,000,000 as damages. (*Id.*) No process has been issued in this case.

II. PRELIMINARY SCREENING

Contemporaneously with this recommendation, the Court has permitted plaintiff to proceed *in forma pauperis*. His complaint is thus subject to *sua sponte* dismissal under 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2). This statute provides that “[n]otwithstanding any filing fee, or any portion thereof, that may have been paid, the court shall dismiss the case at any time if the court determines that –

¹ Plaintiff attaches seventeen numbered pages as part of his “Statement of Claim.”

(A) the allegation of poverty is untrue; or

(B) the action or appeal –

(i) is frivolous or malicious;

(ii) fails to state a claim on which relief may be granted; or

(iii) seeks monetary relief against a defendant who is immune from such relief.

As demonstrated below, plaintiff fails to state a federal or constitutional claim against his attorney upon which relief may be granted. A complaint fails to state a claim upon which relief may be granted when it fails to plead “enough facts to state a claim to relief that is plausible on its face.” *Bell Atl. Corp. v. Twombly*, 127 S. Ct. 1555, 1574 (2007).

III. RELIEF UNDER § 1983

Plaintiff seeks monetary damages against his former attorney under 42 U.S.C. § 1983. That statute “provides a federal cause of action for the deprivation, under color of law, of a citizen’s ‘rights, privileges, or immunities secured by the Constitution and laws’ of the United States.” *Livadas v. Bradshaw*, 512 U.S. 107, 132 (1994). It “afford[s] redress for violations of federal statutes, as well as of constitutional norms.” *Id.* To state a claim under § 1983, plaintiff must allege facts that show (1) he has been deprived of a right secured by the Constitution and the laws of the United States; and (2) the deprivation occurred under color of state law. *See Flagg Bros., Inc. v. Brooks*, 436 U.S. 149, 155 (1978); *Bass v. Parkwood Hosp.*, 180 F.3d 234, 241 (5th Cir. 1999).

Plaintiff’s former attorney is not a state actor for purposes of § 1983. Nevertheless, in certain circumstances, private parties may be acting “under color of state law” and thus held liable under § 1983:

‘Private persons, jointly engaged with state officials in the prohibited action, are acting ‘under color’ of law for purposes of the statute. To act ‘under color’ of law does not require that the accused be an officer of the State. It is enough that he is a willful participant in joint activity with the State or its agents.’

Adickes v. S.H. Kress & Co., 398 U.S. 144, 152 (1970) (quoting *United States v. Price*, 383 U.S. 787, 794 (1966)). To support such a conspiracy claim, plaintiffs “must allege facts that suggest: 1) an agreement between the private and public defendants to commit an illegal act and 2) an actual deprivation of constitutional rights.” *Cinel v. Connick*, 15 F.3d 1338, 1343 (5th Cir. 1994) (citations omitted).

To find state action by a private individual in the absence of an alleged conspiracy, a plaintiff must show that the private actor “performs a function which is traditionally the exclusive province of the state” or that “there is a nexus between the state and the action of the private defendant such that the action is fairly attributable to the state.” *Wong v. Stripling*, 881 F.2d 200, 202 (5th Cir. 1989). Under the latter alternative,

a finding of state action is justified “‘only where it can be said that the state is responsible for the specific conduct of which the plaintiff complains.’ A state is not responsible for a private party’s decisions unless it ‘has exercised coercive power or has provided such significant encouragement, . . . that the choice must in law be deemed to be that of the state.’”

Id. (citations omitted).

Attorneys do not perform a function that is traditionally the exclusive province of the state. In addition, there is no nexus between the State and the actions of the attorney such that the attorney’s actions are fairly attributable to the State. Further, plaintiff has alleged no agreement between his former attorney and any state actor to commit an illegal act. Without an allegation of

some agreement between his former attorney and a state actor, plaintiff has failed to state a viable claim under § 1983 against his defense attorney, and his claims should be dismissed.²

IV. RECOMMENDATION

For the foregoing reasons, it is recommended that the District Court summarily **DISMISS** plaintiff's complaint with prejudice pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(e)(2)(B). Such dismissal will count as a "strike" or "prior occasion" within the meaning 28 U.S.C. § 1915(g).³

SIGNED this 10th day of June, 2008.


IRMA CARRILLO RAMIREZ
UNITED STATES MAGISTRATE JUDGE

² The Court recognizes that *Heck v. Humphrey*, 512 U.S. 477 (1994) could bar the claims raised in the instant action. However, when a case presents issues that are appropriate for early and final determination, the courts may bypass the potential *Heck* bar so as to address such issues. See *Patton v. Jefferson Correctional Ctr.*, 136 F.3d 458, 462 n.6 (5th Cir. 1998) (when an action raises an issue of immunity, the court to the extent it is feasible to do so should determine that issue as early in the proceedings as possible); *Reed v. City of Dallas*, No. 3:05-CV-0004-G, 2006 WL 1876638, at *3-4 (N.D. Tex. June 29, 2006) (accepting recommendation that a lack of state action and a failure to allege any official policy or custom so as to impose municipal liability provides issues that are appropriate for early and final determination); *Smithback v. Cockrell*, No. 3:01-CV-1658-M, 2002 WL 1268031, at *2 (N.D. Tex. June 3, 2002) (accepting recommendation that "[w]hen a plaintiff seeks relief unavailable under 42 U.S.C. § 1983 or sues individuals or entities who are not proper parties under § 1983, it also seems appropriate to have an early determination of those issues"). The instant action presents an issue appropriate for early and final determination.

³ Section 1915(g), which is commonly known as the "three-strikes" provision, provides:

In no event shall a prisoner bring a civil action or appeal a judgment in a civil action or proceeding under this section, if the prisoner has, on 3 or more prior occasions, while incarcerated or detained in any facility, brought an action or appeal in a court of the United States that was dismissed on the grounds that it is frivolous, malicious, or fails to state a claim upon which relief may be granted, unless the prisoner is under imminent danger of serious physical injury.

**INSTRUCTIONS FOR SERVICE AND
NOTICE OF RIGHT TO APPEAL/OBJECT**

The United States District Clerk shall serve a copy of these findings, conclusions, and recommendation on plaintiff by mailing a copy to him. Pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1), any party who desires to object to these findings, conclusions and recommendation must file and serve written objections within ten days after being served with a copy. A party filing objections must specifically identify those findings, conclusions, or recommendation to which objections are being made. The District Court need not consider frivolous, conclusory, or general objections. Failure to file written objections to the proposed findings, conclusions, and recommendation within ten days after being served with a copy shall bar the aggrieved party from appealing the factual findings and legal conclusions of the Magistrate Judge that are accepted by the District Court, except upon grounds of plain error. *Douglass v. United Servs. Auto Ass'n*, 79 F.3d 1415, 1428-29 (5th Cir. 1996) (*en banc*).


IRMA CARRILLO RAMIREZ
UNITED STATES MAGISTRATE JUDGE